

A.R.M.S.

ASSESS, REFER, MONITOR, SUPPORT

POST-THREAT—BEHAVIOR SUPPORT PLANS¹

Mike

Mike is a middle school student who has recently experienced two losses, death of a non-custodial father he has not seen since the age of 4, and his much loved dog that recently died of cancer. Prior to these events, Mike was a well-liked, well-behaved student with a 2.8 grade point average. He has received special education services in a resource program since 4th grade for a mild learning disability affecting written language. ADHD is also in evidence, though Mike shows no hyperactive behaviors in class at this time. Mike became despondent and somewhat sullen after the losses. Two weeks later, Mike told two different small groups of peers that he saw no reason for living, and that he “might as well snuff himself and for that matter all of them.” This statement was made immediately following 2nd period, following his receiving a reprimand for missing homework assignments in science class. Mike has no history of acting out behavior and no history of making threats. The threat assessment team viewed the threat as a serious, substantive threat. Per the schools arrangement with law enforcement in the area, the police were notified and chose to participate in the extended inquiry process, though ultimately no charges were made. Suspension of 5 days occurred, followed by a meeting in which the district elected not to recommend for expulsion, so no manifestation determination or functional behavioral assessment was conducted. The site administrator requested the IEP team meet to develop a Behavior Support Plan to monitor future behavior. Parent agreed to take Mike to the private therapist referred by the school to address emotional needs. The offer of in-school counseling was declined.

Ralph

Ralph is an 8th grade student with a reading disability who has been in the Resource Specialist Program since 4th grade. His parents are non-English speaking immigrants. Ralph has had 17 office referrals in two years and has had numerous serious fights in the last two years. Offenses have been refusing to do work, improper clothing, swearing at teachers, failing to suit out for PE, physical fighting and reportedly sexual harassment of a 6th grade girl off campus. These offenses have increased in intensity since entering middle school as a 6th grader. There were no offenses prior to middle school and he has been in the same district since 2nd grade. His grades in elementary school were “B”s and “C”s. In middle school his grades have dropped to an average of “D+”. There has been no behavior support plan for Ralph, though he did participate in a bi-weekly “motivational” group with the counselor. Ralph made a verbal threat to harm a peer involving firearms. Following an initial inquiry, the police joined the school-based threat assessment team. This threat was determined to be a very serious, substantive threat. Expulsion was considered, but the IEP team held the required manifestation determination and concluded that no “supplementary aids and supports” for his increasing behavior problems had been provided (i.e., a behavior support plan) and that the verbal threat was part of the emerging aggression pattern that the team believed should have been addressed in the IEP. The results of the functional behavioral assessment were clear: Ralph’s behaviors were attempts to gain attention, recognition and status from peers who were gang involved. This had been true throughout middle school. Ralph himself was discovered to be a member of a gang. Ralph’s parents were very upset following the threat assessment because of the lack of previous school attention, and the appointment of a probation officer to monitor his activities following a shoplifting episode. They were pleased to note that the alternate setting recommended by the probation officer at the IEP team meeting would be implementing a behavior support plan and communicating with them regularly.

Cali

Cali is a 16 year old girl of Korean decent. She and her parents immigrated to the United States in her kindergarten year. Cali learned English readily and earned As and Bs throughout her elementary and middle school years. She was popular with her peers and regularly attended play dates and sleepovers with a large group of girls through middle school. In 9th grade, Cali saw the school counselor several times concerning parent/child conflict over differences in expectations for her social life. It was discovered that her parents utilized harsh disciplinary practices when Cali lied to meet her friends at the movie theatre on several occasions. These episodes required child abuse reporting. Following the report, and a cross cultural child protective services interview by an employee familiar with Korean parental discipline practices, the parents agreed to discontinue the tactics. Subsequently, Cali became increasingly despondent in school and her academic performance declined sharply. She complained of her parents expecting “old-world behavior” and that she felt “trapped between two cultures”. Peers reported suicide ideation to the school counselor, and she was interviewed for suicide risk by the school psychologist. Cali denied these feelings, claimed to be joking. She was referred for school counselor services to address “improving academic effort” and “to monitor her emotional status.” Throughout Cali’s sophomore year, Cali made periodic deprecating comments about her skills in class, such as “I can’t do anything right! I might as well be dead! Maybe you should be too!” These episodes were finally brought to the attention of the school principal in February. After an initial inquiry by the school principal, the school psychologist was asked to interview her again as part of the school’s threat assessment protocol. When called out of class, just before leaving the room, Cali responded to a peer who “giggled” by pressing a pair of scissors hard against the classmate’s stomach. This resulted in an out of school suspension for 5 days, with recommendation for expulsion for brandishing a weapon. On the first day of the suspension, the school psychologist, suspecting a clinical depression, referred the family to a clinic specializing in working with bi-cultural students. A subsequent four week hospitalization occurred. It was discovered during the hospitalization that Cali was suffering from depression with potential psychotic features (auditory hallucinations were admitted during the hospital stay). She began antidepressant and antipsychotic medication during this hospitalization. The district elected to expel, but suspended the expulsion. Upon release from the hospital, Cali returned to the district. An assessment for “suspected disability” was initiated. After careful analysis, Cali’s school team felt a diagnosis of “Emotional Disturbance” was not yet warranted. No IEP was written. The school requested a comprehensive behavior support plan to monitor and support Cali upon her return.

¹ Behavior plans will rarely, by themselves, be adequate stand-alone support for a student with significant intervention needs. The attached plans are to be used in conjunction with other agency’s services and intervention plans. A behavior support plan is to address immediate and immediate-past situations and contexts in which troubling behavior has occurred and may occur again in the future. It informs teachers and other school staff about how to address the behavior if it occurs again and how to improve the immediate environment to best support the student who has demonstrated problem behavior. A behavior support plan is not designed to address longer-range problems and conditions which should be addressed through services such as behavioral health/mental health, probation, family support and interventions, and other community-based services.